

## Prime minister launches NHS inspectorate

Andy McSmith *London*

The government's new health watchdog, the Commission for Health Improvement, was launched last week. The prime minister announced the details of the long promised commission, which will inspect every hospital and general practice in England and Wales every four years.

The commission has a daunting set of tasks, including spearheading the new war on cancer and identifying crisis issues at an early stage.

Mr Blair described the new commission as "a standards watchdog that will go round every hospital and primary care group in the country promoting good practice and high standards and rooting out the bad." He added: "We've given it a tough remit. It will examine the quality of the care from the point of view of patients. For the first time it will make sure all consultants are participating in outside audit of their work. It will investigate how well hospital departments are working together to prevent people

waiting on trolleys when they shouldn't.

"It will check that the best treatments as recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) are being used.

"It will make sure hospitals monitor the outcomes of operations and check on how effective they are, and that hospitals check the qualifications of all locums and stand-in staff to make sure they are up to the job.

"It will make sure that hospitals are training junior doctors properly and not making them work dangerously long hours; that medical records are up to date, available when they should be, and safely kept; and that patients' complaints are dealt with promptly and properly."

He confirmed that the commission's first director will be Peter Homa, who has been the health department's waiting list "tsar" for 18 months. Mr Homa, aged 42, who started his career in the NHS as a hospital porter, was previously chief executive of the Leicester Royal Infirmary.



Tony Blair announces the setting up of the Commission for Health Improvement: "We've given it a tough remit"

The commission will be chaired by Dame Deidre Hine, who was chief medical officer for Wales until 1997.

The NHS Confederation said that it was worried about how the commission was going to inter-relate with the other bodies that inspect and judge the NHS.

Stephen Thornton, the confederation's chief executive, said: "Our principal concern remains

the issue of how CHI's work will inter-relate with that of other agencies and bodies that presently sit in judgment over NHS organisations.

"In particular how will CHI's role mesh with that of the Audit Commission, the medical royal colleges, the health service ombudsman, and the performance management function of regional offices?" he asked. □

## American Medical Association launches new internet "supersite"

Fred Charatan *Florida*

The American Medical Association, together with six national medical associations, is setting up a high quality health information and communication site on the internet. Medem.com (standing for "medical empowerment") will make its website available in early 2000.

The partners in medem.com are the American Academy of Ophthalmology; the American Academy of Pediatrics; the American College of Allergy, Asthma

and Immunology; the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; the American Psychiatric Association; and the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons.

"Medem.com is the website that patients all across America have been waiting for. The patient-physician relationship is the heart and soul of quality health care," said American Medical Association trustee Dr William Mahood.

Dr Edward Fotsch, a former emergency room physician, who is Medem's chief executive, said that doctors needed a reliable source of information for patients, and by bringing together seven medical societies, the company would provide it.

Medem is a for profit company. Five per cent of Medem is owned by a charity, the Medem Trust, which will use its profits to provide health care for poor patients, Dr Fotsch said.

The venture comes at a time when Dr C Everett Koop, majority owner of DrKoop.com (18 Sep, p 727), a leader among the 17 000 websites giving health-care information, is again under

fire for his role in a warning on hospital gloves.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health was about to warn health workers that powdered latex gloves could cause serious allergic reactions, when Dr Koop called Dr Linda Rosenstock, the director of the institute in 1997 to pour scorn on the warning.

He told a House of Representatives Committee looking into the question that the hazards of the gloves were exaggerated, but he did not disclose to the committee that he had received \$656 250 (£410 200) in consulting fees from a contract with the company manufacturing the gloves. □